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DEPARTMENT FOR RMA AND EAP/MLS
BANGKOK ALSO FOR REFUGEE COORDINATOR HONNOLD
GENEVA FOR RMA

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [VM](#) [CB](#)
SUBJECT: UNHCR PICKS UP MONTAGNARDS IN MONDOLKIRI

REF: PHNOM PENH 1723

1. (SBU) Following interventions from the Ambassador and A/DCM (Reftel), UNHCR was able to mount a joint expedition with representatives of MFA and MOI to the northeastern province of Mondolkiri to rescue 13 Montagnard asylum seekers. The September 27-30 journey was the first UNHCR visit to Mondolkiri since December 2004. UNHCR Phnom Penh Director Thamrongsak Meechubot told us that comments to the press by the NGO Adhoc's provincial coordinator that five other Montagnards in the province were arrested and sent back to Vietnam were purely speculation. Thamrongsak noted that the NGOs often exaggerate the number of Montagnards waiting to be taken out of the jungle and said the NGOs seldom know exactly how many asylum seekers are involved.

2. (SBU) Thamrongsak said that most Montagnards who travel through Mondolkiri originate in Dak Lak and Dak Nong provinces of Vietnam and most of those who arrive directly at the UNHCR office in Phnom Penh travel through Mondolkiri. The recent pattern, he said, was for relatives in the U.S. to send funds to the Montagnards in Vietnam, who then hire guides to escort them from their home province to Phnom Penh. After arriving in Phnom Penh, they were turned over to the NGOs Human Rights Watch (HRW) or Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), which then escorted them to UNHCR's office. Thamrongsak reported that in 2006 direct arrivals to Phnom Penh (91) have nearly equaled the number of those rescued in northeastern Cambodia (117). The Montagnard population in UNHCR's Phnom Penh sites as of October 2 is 285.

3, (SBU) Thamrongsak commented that he did not expect future problems in obtaining access to Montagnards who arrive in Mondolkiri, although he said that he believed the Cambodian authorities were not happy with the prospect of another gateway into Cambodia opening to Montagnards. The Cambodians, he commented, would like to restrict the entry points to the degree possible.

4. (SBU) There was no pressure currently from the Cambodian government (RGC) to expedite the processing of Montagnards, Thamrongsak said. As long as there was a steady flow to resettlement countries and the influx did not surge, he believed the RGC would remain relaxed. Thamrongsak observed that the Vietnamese government (GVN) did not appear to be pressuring the Cambodians on this issue. (Comment: This view is not necessarily held by some of his fellow UNHCR staff members as well as sources within the MOI. End Comment.) Thamrongsak said that the Vietnamese representative at the recent tripartite talks told him that the Vietnamese trusted UNHCR (a distinct departure from earlier Vietnamese attitudes). In Thamrongsak's view UNHCR

has gained Vietnamese trust because it has become more open in its operations and was more engaged with Vietnam through its Hanoi office. He also suggested that there was a generational change going on among Vietnamese officials in the GVN's MFA.

CAMPBELL